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ABSTRACT

At the University of Alabama at Birmingham, a diversified program for training graduate level students in visual impairments involves state agencies in the training. Based on needs assessment data, the program was established using community resources as training sites and specialists as course instructors. Facilities participating include the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind, the Alabama Public Schools, the Chauncey Sparks Center for Developmental Disorders, the Eye Foundation Hospital, the Regional Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, the School of Optometry-Low Vision Clinic, and the Veterans' Administration Southeastern Blind Rehabilitation Center. The agencies provide information, training sites, and state-of-the-art equipment for use within the vision program. The program provides quality training on a restricted budget. (CL)

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Interagency Cooperation For Teacher Training

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Interagency Cooperation for Teacher Training

Abstract:

Preparation of personnel in low incidence handicaps often requires innovataive planning in order to provide quality experiences with limited funding. Utilization of community resources as interagency cooperation can meet the teacher preparation needs if planning and coordination are successful.

At the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) such planning and coordination has proved successful for the past five years. The program for training graduate level students in visual impairments is coordinated in such a way that agencies within the state are involved in training procedures and hours.

Approximately fifty graduate level students have participated in this diversified training program. It is the opinion of the instructors and students that the many experiences are beneficial for future teachers of the visually impaired.

Training Program Background:

Historically, visually impaired individuals have met obstacles which hinder maximum potential and achievement of educational and/or vocational goals. Public Law 94-142 and its guidelines has focused attention on providing free and appropriate educational opportunities within the least restrictive environment for special needs children. As a result, many local education agencies (LEAs) and state education agencies (SEAs) have expressed concern as to how to best meet the needs of VI children in the absence of certified personnel.

The Special Education Department at UAB recognized VI as a low incidence but much needed area for personnel preparation. This need was

based on information gathered from a survey sent to 61 city school systems, 67 county school systems, and the Alabama School for the Blind (ASB). Needs of private schools were not assessed. Of the 128 LEAs surveyed, 79 responded. The data indicated that 30 school districts did not provide any VI services while 49 LEAs served a total of 346 students (17 preschool youngsters, 204 elementary pupils, and 125 secondary students). ASB reported 137 children were being served for a total of 483 VI students. The survey revealed, however, that approximately 108 VI children were underserved.

The majority of VI students are served in large urban areas. Of the 49 LEAs reporting VI services, six were urban serving 226 of the 346 identified VI children, or approximately 65% of the total number served. Thus, rural areas in Alabama require particular attention both in identifying and serving VI children.

Thirty-three of LEA's reported that 53 VI students were served via a residential program at the Alabama School for the Blind. Seventeen of these LEAs believed that they could provide local services for these students, however, the absence of certified personnel contributed to these children being served in a residential environment. Thus, one could speculate that many LEAs, particularly rural ones, would be more diligent about locally serving VI students in a cost effective manner if they could provide teacher services.

Results of the assessment also revealed that there are 41 fully certified VI teachers and 14 educators currently employed under temporary waivers pursuing certification. LEAs reported a need for 30 additional certified VI teachers. The needs assessment also made note of the fact that 31 teachers

are interested in pursuing graduate level training in the field of visual impairment.

From a state perspective, Comprehensive System for Program Delivery (CSPD) data from the Alabama State Department of Education (SDE) revealed that as of December 1, 1985 722 children at the elementary and secondary levels were identified as VI with an additional 36 preschool youngsters for a state total of 758 children ages 0-21. This figure is inclusive of children served by the LEAs and the Alabama School for the Blind. (The discrepancy between the departmental survey data and the SDE figures is attributed to the 62% return rate for the departmental questionnaire). Excluding the 22 teachers employed by ASB, the State Department of Education identified 24 fully certified VI instructors in Alabama with an additional 8 teachers possessing temporary certification. CSPD documents reveal, however, that for the 1985-86 school year,an additional 19 certified VI teachers were needed in Alabama for full implementation of P. L. 94-142. The need, therefore, for certified educators within Alabama is readily apparent.

Program Strategy:

With a need identified and an established graduate program in visual impairment already in place, staff adjustments were made. State funding of small programs was slight, so a state-wide meeting was hosted by UAB to determine support of a newly designed teacher training program. Persons attending the meeting represented various agencies that serve the blind and visually impaired. It was agreed at this meeting that community resources should be utilized as training sites and specialists should be used as course instructors.

Resource Utilization:

The community and university resources provided access to facilities as follows:

ALABAMA INSTITUTE FOR THE DEAF AND BLIND

Observation of and participation in day and residential educational, recreational and vocational activities provided to visually impaired, deaf-blind, and multihandicapped children and young adults. Exposure to transitional living experiences, orientation and mobility training, opportunity to work with low vision aids. Practicum training site.

ALABAMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public schools housing a program for the blind and partially sighted students. Opportunity to observe visually impaired children in resource rooms, in regular classrooms, and other special education settings. Opportunity to observe itinerant/resource program orientation and mobility program. Offers a variety of experiences including observation, lectures, and practicum experiences. Hands-on experiences in use of closed circuit television, optacon, and braille. Practicum training site.

CHAUNCEY SPARKS CENTER FOR DEVELOPMENTAL AND DISORDERS (SPARKS CENTER)

Observation of evaluation, treatment, and remediation of individuals with developmental disabilities. Observation of vision function team with other interdisciplinary teams such as instructional technology, psychology, medicine, nutrition, physical therapy, special education and vocational rehabilitation.

EYE FOUNDATION HOSPITAL

Selected observations of eye surgery, vision assessment and functions, treatment programs in inpatient/outpatient clinics, prosthesis laboratory with related lecture.

REGIONAL LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

Site for observation of library system housing braille, large print, talking library books and magazines. Opportunity to become familiar with electronic aids and appliances for reading by the visually impaired youth and adult.

SCHOOL OF OPTOMETRY- LOW VISION CLINIC

Opportunity for variety of experiences including on-site visits, observations, lecture programs, hands-on activites in low vision assessment and training, orientation and mobility services, parent counseling, school eye evaluation teams, community service to visually impaired youth and adults. Resource for specialized instructional materials, equipment, techniques and technology in education and other fields of visually impaired. Hands-on observation of Kurzweil Reading Machine, closed circuit television, optical aids - magnifiers, telescopes and braille.

VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION

SOUTHEASTERN BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER

Opportunity for observation, lectures, workshops, tutoring, and practicum work in individual specialized classes. Classes relating to assessment and evaluation of vision function, orientation and mobility, community services, communication skills, daily living skills, low vision aids, and appliances related to visually impaired individuals. Resource for unique, specialized instructional materials, equipment, techniques, technology, and research.. Opportunity to observe and experience hands-on training with the optacon, closed circuit television, Kurzweil Reading Machine, viewscan, lazer cane, and cantebury head set. Also state of the art computer technology.

The UAB School of Education relates to the other agencies listed as a coordinating, evaluating, and delegating authority. This is mandated because of the responsibility of UAB for course content and accreditation standards. (Figure 1)

Training Implementation:

The next step for recruitment and public awareness strategy, as well as inservice training opportunities, was the "Comprehensive System of Personnel Training" plan. (Figure 2) This idea encompasses the many places where knowledge transfer concerning the visually impaired and blind may be made.

Adjunct professors are members of various professional organizations. Participation as presentors has publicized the teacher training program. The new ideas and researach gained through membership in these groups has benefited the students in the program.

Adjunct personnel have been requested to train professionals in other fields concerning low vision and visual impairments. Instructors have also visited other universities, both in and out of state, to teach the "visual impairment" section of the introduction to special education courses required by all education majors in Alabama. All of these efforts help the visibility of a small teacher training program within a larger university system.

State of the Art Technology:

Community resources have been utilized for continuing knowledge transfer for technological advances. (Figure 3) The agencies listed provide information, training sites, and state-of-the-art equipment for use within the vision program. New techniques for assessment, surgery, low vision prescription, computer usage, mobility aids, braille technology, service delivery, journal articles, and research are available for staff and students. Sites for classes or seminars are provided as an in-kind gesture.

Program Outcome:

Theoretically, a dream list of possible opportunities for training in visual impairments has been written. Then, to the instructor and graduate student's delight, doors have been opened and knowledge and expertise have been shared.

It is important to the blind and visually impaired persons of our state that the professionals have joined hands to create and maintain a quality teacher preparation model. Persons providing the training in visual impairments have educational degrees ranging from M.D., O.D., and Ph D. to Masters levels in Orientation and Mobility, Visual Impairments, Deaf/Blind,Multihandicapped, Speech Pathology, and Administration. The coordination for the program is led by the Chairman of Special Education and two part-time visual impairment specialists. Comprehensive examinations are designed by all instructors.

The vision program is an innovative method of providing quality preservice training on a restricted budget. The teacher training plan is designed to prepare candidates to follow the UAB curriculum outline required for degree candidates. Training strategy validity has been proved by scores on the Alabama Teacher Certification Test which show a 100% pass rate.

The vision program in Alabama is utilizing unique community agencies and specialists to train future professionals by working together for one goal-to improve the lives of the blind and visually impaired.

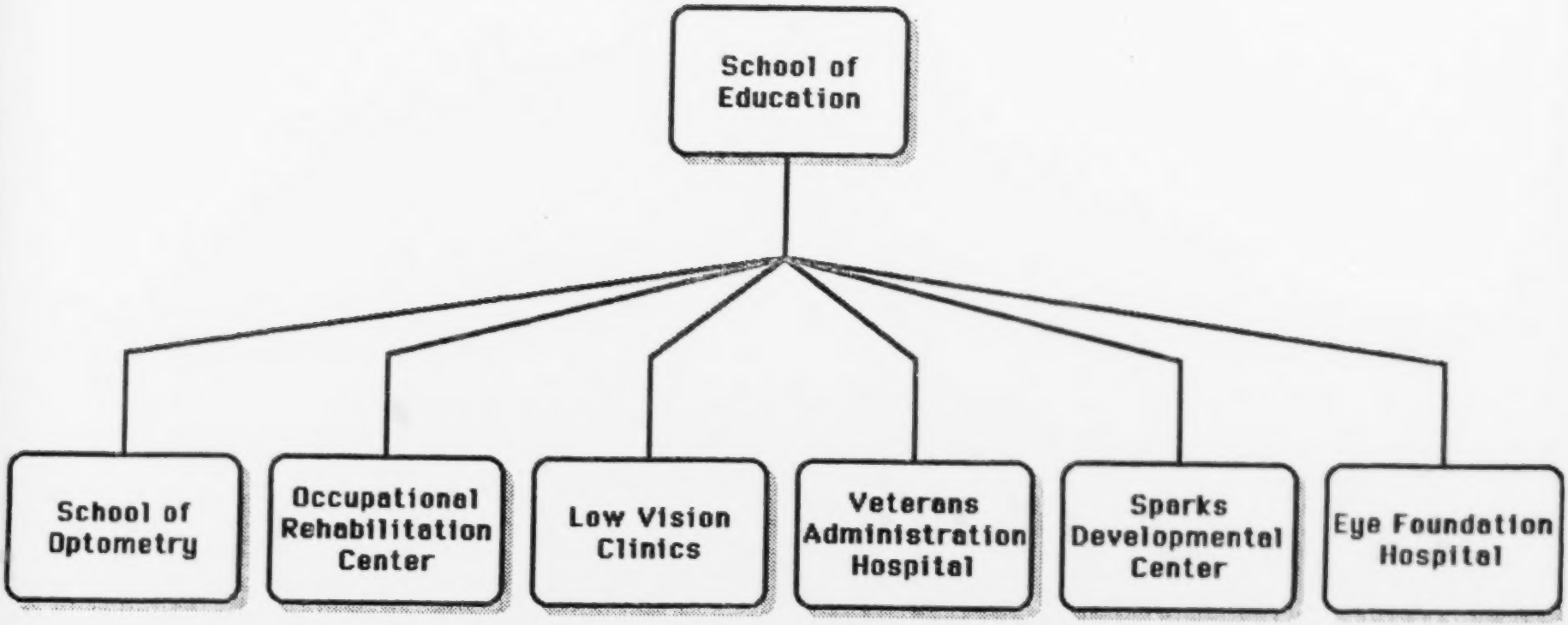
School of Education
School of Optometry
Occupational Rehabilitation Center
Low Vision Clinics
Veterans Administration Hospital
Sparks Developmental Center
Eye Foundation Hospital

Figure 1

Figure 2

Comprehensive System of Personnel Training

- Academy of Optometry
- State Special Education Advisory Committee
- SOMA
- Headstart
- AERB
- Alabama Comprehensive System of Personnel Development
- DVH
- Alabama Hospital Association
- American Academy of Ophthalmology
- Health Education Department
- Very Special Arts
- Associated University Systems
- Children's Dance Foundation
- State Inservice Centers
- CEC
- Introduction to Special Education Courses
- Parent Groups

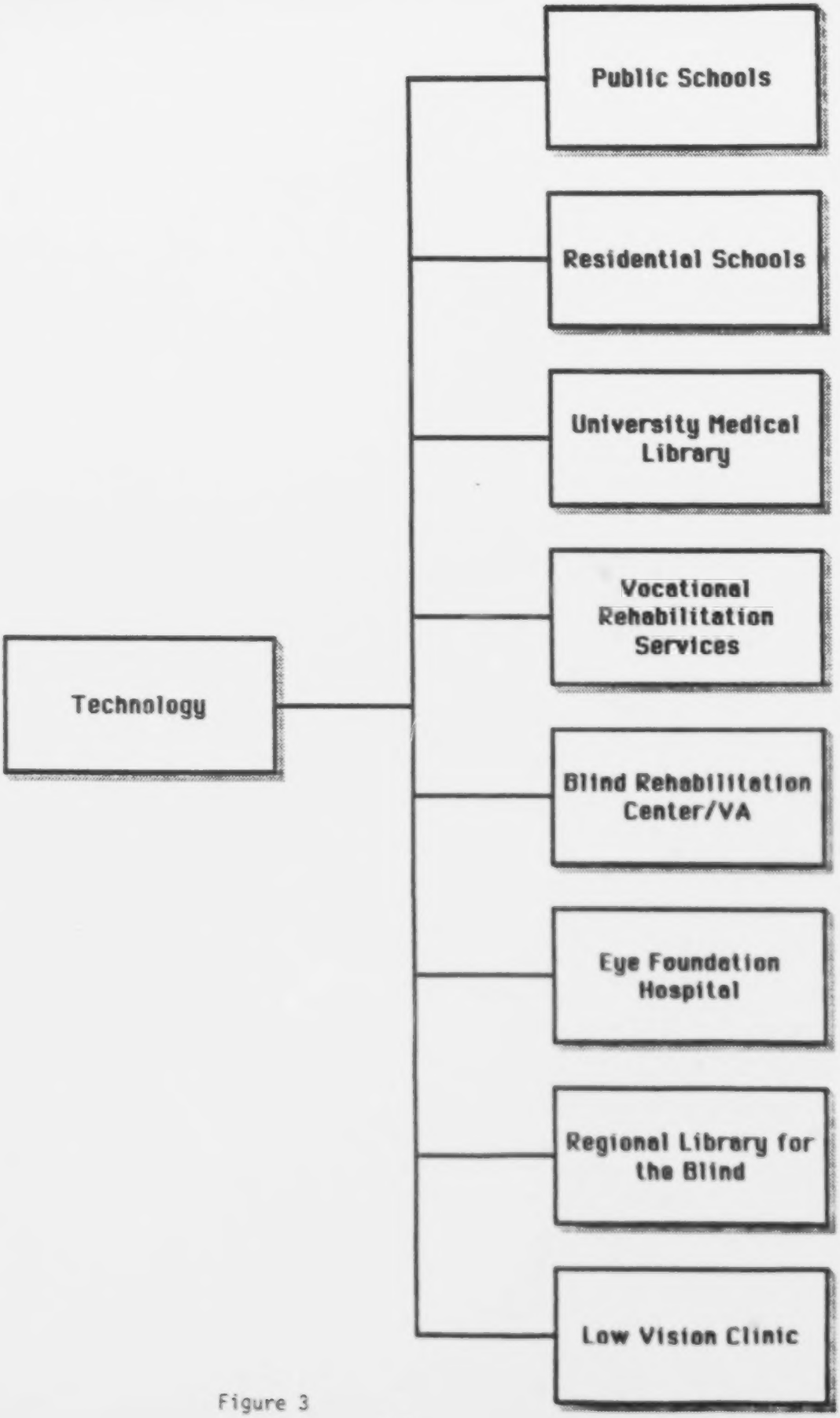
Technology
Public Schools
Residential Schools
University Medical Library
Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Blind Rehabilitation Center/VA
Eye Foundation Hospital
Regional Library for the Blind
Low Vision Clinic

Figure 3